

Review Articles

American Libraries: A German View

Zur Praxis der Wissenschaftlichen Bibliotheken in den USA (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1956; Beiträge zum Buch- und Bibliothekswesen ed. by Carl Wehmer, Bd. 5) 222p.

The volume under review contains six contributions on American university and research libraries by prominent German librarians who visited the United States after the end of World War II. Each of the contributors deals with one or more aspects of the subject. The editor of the series, Carl Wehmer, states in a postscript that the volume makes no claim at comprehensiveness, but merely intends to bring together in one volume a series of observations and ideas that may prove useful to German librarians in the solution of practical library problems. Since the contributions are unrevised and unedited, some subjects are discussed more than once; this duplication, however, is not serious or objectionable.

In a brief preface, Gustav Hofmann dedicates the volume to his colleagues in American scholarly libraries in recognition of the hospitality which German librarians received in the United States during the decade following the war. The volume deserves the careful attention of American librarians. Despite its modest claims, it is typical of German scholarly thoroughness; and some of the contributions, notably those by Gerhard Liebers and Walter Bauhuis, may be worth translating to make them more widely accessible.

(1) Fritz Redenbacher discusses the nature of the library profession and basic issues in education for librarianship in the United States. His treatment of these subjects is well documented and perceptive; it will give librarians outside the United States a reliable conception of some of the major problems and difficulties troubling American librarians in their striving toward recognition as a profession. German librarians are characterized as more intensively book-

centered, and American librarians as more strongly service-centered. The American interest in mechanization is viewed sympathetically. The staffing of American academic libraries is shown to be fundamentally different from the German tradition, especially in the relatively smaller number of highly trained bibliographic subject specialists employed in book selection work. He is critical of the heavy use of part-time student assistants. In his attempt to characterize the personality of the American librarian, the author attributes a somewhat exaggerated importance to the methods and findings of Alice I. Bryan's *The Public Librarian* (Columbia, 1952). He goes deeply into the questions of intellectual freedom, the shortage of librarians, recruiting, salaries, library training, and the curricula of library schools. Especially illuminating is his analysis of controversies as to whether library schools should emphasize the practical or the theoretical as well as how to define these two terms. Redenbacher leaves no doubt about his conviction that librarianship is a profession, not only because of a recognized code of professional ethics and the existence of basic principles underlying library practice, but also because of a consciousness of common purpose and a strong bond among librarians all over the globe as well as a recognition that the practical, technical, and fundamental problems facing libraries are similar everywhere.

(2) Liebers supplies a thorough and comprehensive illustrated survey of recent trends in American library buildings. No important aspect of the subject is omitted in his well-organized treatment. It is doubtful whether any American librarian has read and digested as much of the extensive literature on academic as well as public library buildings as Liebers obviously has. He describes the new American style in terms of (a) an effort to bring books and readers together, (b) the breaking up of reading areas into the divisional system, (c) the modular system, (d) flexibility, and (e) exterior architecture. He sympathetically philosophizes on the new style as a humanizing effort to counteract the overemphasis on technologi-

cal perfection and efficiency with which the United States is often (perhaps unjustifiedly) identified in the minds of Europeans. Although approving what American librarians have achieved, Liebers warns his European colleagues not to copy blindly the American style, but instead to analyze the framework within which European libraries operate and to find new solutions appropriate for their special requirements.

(3) Bauhais gives an exemplary scholarly account of problems and developments in acquisition, cataloging, and storage, buttressed with 324 bibliographic footnotes and occasional references to personal observations. Among the subjects covered are the problems arising from the division of work into professional and non-professional categories, exchanges of publications, acquisitions policy, the Farmington Plan, participation of the faculty in book selection, the dictionary catalog versus the classified catalog, code revision, cooperative cataloging, union catalogs, open versus closed stacks, and storage libraries. More so than the other contributors to this volume, Bauhais is at times critical (although always politely so) of American practices; e.g., he favors closed stacks and seems to agree with those who feel that the demand for delivery of a book from the stacks in less than twenty-four hours after a book has been requested is unreasonable. Although Bauhais's account is largely accurate, a few of his observations and interpretations are open to question or call for slight correction. For example, he alleges that American university presidents are concerned about a presumed shortage of highly qualified librarians to fill university library directorships (p. 90); or he implies that use of statistical studies of the frequency of references to scholarly periodicals as a basis for the selection of such periodicals for libraries reflects a lack of self-confidence on the part of librarians in the realm of scholarship (p. 102); or he takes the increase in the number of library schools offering the Ph.D. degree as evidence of a disinclination to use highly trained subject specialists as selection officers in academic libraries (p. 106). These disagreements with Bauhais's account, however, are minor and do not detract from the overall high quality of his achievement in draw-

ing for German librarians a realistic picture of major trends and controversies in technical services of American libraries. German librarians, he feels, can profit greatly from a study of how Americans have been trying to solve their library problems, for sooner or later German libraries will be faced with the same problems.

(4) Gisela von Busse describes and penetratingly analyzes three cooperative projects in the field of acquisitions: (a) With reference to the Cooperative Acquisitions Project for Wartime Publications, she points out that projects of this sort require that a participating library assume service obligations beyond the confines of its own clientele, and that the materials be acquired according to a sharply defined selection policy; some dissatisfaction resulted in the United States from a failure to observe these two principles. (b) The Documents Expediting Project flourished, according to von Busse, because it did not limit itself to distribution of government publications, but shifted its emphasis to the active hunting after important hidden or out-of-the-way publications and their acquisition and because it did allow for careful selection by participating libraries. (c) The Farmington Plan, which in its fundamentals is similar to the German cooperative acquisitions plan characterized by so-called *Sondersammelgebiete*, is described by von Busse as a model to demonstrate how librarians can attack and solve a problem posed by the world of scholarship; the Plan required the subordination of the self-interests of individual research libraries to a common national interest. In her critique she emphasizes the importance of careful selection of publications and warns against the striving for completeness of coverage because of the intolerable burden it imposes upon participating libraries. She also raises the interesting question as to whether the principle of national self-sufficiency (autarky) in the collecting of books is defensible in a time of peace. Should not libraries help each other irrespective of national boundaries? If a given title cannot be located in an American library, why not try to rely on a system of international interlibrary loans? To these questions, von Busse's answer is that Americans perhaps do not wish to make

undue demands upon the libraries of foreign countries, and that an effort toward American bibliographic self-sufficiency may be justified in view of the size of the United States and her distance from European libraries.

(5) Richard Mummendey's description of public service aspects of American research libraries is based more on personal impressions gained during his visits to numerous libraries than upon a comprehensive study of the literature. His treatment is, therefore, somewhat unbalanced (e.g., he devotes too much space to circulation and interlibrary loan routines) and contains a few minor slips (e.g., he states [p. 179] that the University of Chicago has a professional library staff of 300, whereas the actual figure reported for 1955/56 was 120) and some omissions (e.g., it includes no discussion of reference service or the subject divisional system; and his treatment of the branch library problem is too sketchy). Nevertheless his contribution is not unacceptable. He covers service to undergraduates, reserves, open shelves, circulation routines, departmental libraries, regulations for off-campus users, hours, interlibrary loans, and cooperative storage libraries. He identifies aspects of American libraries that differ from their German counterparts: e.g., American libraries have to take care of the needs of undergraduates, some allow students access to the stacks, their loan periods are shorter, the connection between departmental and the general library of a university is closer, staff working hours are shorter but library hours longer, etc.

Although the account may lack comprehensiveness and critical sharpness, it has the virtue of being a little more vivid in style and somewhat less ponderous than some of the other accounts. From the point of view of immediate reforms called for in German libraries, it may well contain more useful information than other chapters in this volume.

(6) In the final chapter of the volume, Martin Cremer presents a succinct history of the development of the Library of Congress into a national library. This account is solidly factual and calls for no detailed critique.

The volume, which is well printed, but

issued without hard-cover binding, comes equipped with a compact subject index prepared by Walter Bauhuis, one of the contributors.

It is evident throughout that the visiting librarians from Germany have been profoundly impressed by what they saw in American libraries even though they have been critical of certain developments that run counter to their tradition. As series-editor Carl Wehmer points out, no German librarian believes any longer that he can ignore the contributions of American librarianship in efforts at analyzing and solving professional library problems in Germany; in this connection, he says, superficial enthusiasm as well as superficial disdain are out of place. A knowledge of the facts is the first necessary step in deriving profit from the experience of American libraries. This commendable volume paves the way for the acquisition of such knowledge.—Robert H. Muller, *University of Michigan Library*.

University of Tennessee Library Lectures

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Edited by John H. Dobson. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 1957. 62 pp.

Each spring the University of Tennessee Library invites an outstanding librarian or teacher to give the annual University of Tennessee Library Lecture. These are published in groups of three lectures to a volume. Previous lecturers in the series have been Maurice Tauber, Louis R. Wilson, John Burchard, Robert Downs, Lester Asheim, and Lawrence Clark Powell, speaking either on the subject of the library in education or about the problems facing university and research libraries. In a series of this kind, through which the University of Tennessee Library may be considered to have joined the libraries of the University of Illinois and the University of Pennsylvania in instituting annual library lectures of a high standard, it would be expected that the lectures be general in appeal (with a